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Tolkien's Word-Hord Onl̃ac

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Abstract

Explores “the stylized and conventional speeches” of Beowulf and the Green Knight as they “provide analogues for Tolkien’s heroes in *The Lord of the Rings*.” Contends that analysis of these speeches enhances awareness of many aspects of these heroes.

Additional Keywords

Beowulf; Heroes; Linguistics; Sir Gawain and the Green Knight; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Frodo; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Gandalf; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Sam Gamgee; Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Lord of the Rings*—Language; Wiglaf

Tolkien's Word-Hord OnLeac

RICKY L. THOMPSON

INTRODUCTION

In his biography of J. R. R. Tolkien, Humphrey Carpenter records that the author often "delighted his friends with recitations" from *Beowulf* and from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, among other works of northern Europe.¹ Both of these tales focus on a man of heroic stature. *Beowulf* is the Anglo-Saxon epic poem which tells of the Geat warrior Beowulf, who battles various monsters. *Sir Gawain*, a fourteenth century English poem, tells the story of Gawain, a knight of King Arthur's court, who quests for the Green Knight so that he may submit his neck to a stroke from the green man's axe. This thesis will explore the stylized and conventional speeches of these heroes as these speeches provide analogues for Tolkien's heroes in *The Lord of the Rings*. Analysis of these speeches enhances an awareness of the heroes' confrontation with a cynical opponent, the heroes' style of storytelling, the heroic loyalty of the champions' faithful companions, and also underscores the heroes' sense of destiny as they pursue a mission of doom.

One reason for focusing on the language of the heroes is to observe their perceptions of themselves and the world in which they live. W. P. Ker describes a hero as one who is "best at the things with which everyone is familiar."² The hero is unsurpassed in physical prowess, manners, bravery, and perhaps above all else, in his "power of mind" (K 8). The "power of mind" manifests itself most dramatically in the speech of the hero. C. M. Bowra asserts that wherever heroic poetry exists, speeches will be found, for speeches "reveal a hero's personality by the way in which he speaks...."³

Since he was fascinated by these medieval tales of northern Europe, it is reasonable that the heroic speech of the characters in Tolkien's *The Fellowship of the Ring*, *The Two Towers*, and *The Return of the King*, collectively known as *The Lord of the Rings*, have analogical roots in this early body of literature. In his essay "*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," Tolkien states that the poem is made up of "tales often told before and elsewhere, and of elements that derive from remote times, beyond the vision or awareness of the poet...."⁴ This statement is equally true of *The Lord of the Rings*; indeed, Patricia Spacks claims that the language of the trilogy "evokes memories of fairy tales and of the legends of chivalry.... The language of the books is entirely an instrument of the story."⁵ Tolkien's characters, such as Gandalf, the wizard who physically and verbally battles the Dark Lord's forces of evil, Frodo, the hobbit on a quest of doom, and Sam, Frodo's loyal companion, are all endowed with language of heroic proportions. Drawing on the entire heroic tradition, these speeches, which have their probable sources in *Beowulf* and *Sir Gawain*, help build the stature of Gandalf, Sam, and

Frodo. Gandalf and Beowulf share mutual traits, while the same is true of Wiglaf, Beowulf's companion, and Sam, and Frodo and Gawain.

These sources become significant connections between Tolkien's works and the medieval works. In regard to "connections," as F. P. Pickering explains:

We generally recognize connections, whether between works of literature or works of art, as something distinct from fortuitous resemblances. We are not slow to declare chance similarities to be without significance, irrelevant, misleading, best dismissed; until some fact of which we had not been aware, or had been inclined to disregard, shows them in a different light. This may make them significant after all.... They become connections.⁶

The intent of this article is, by way of forging significant connections, to propose analogies of heroic language within *Beowulf* and *Sir Gawain* for Gandalf, Sam and Frodo of *The Lord of the Rings*. During the course of researching this paper, I have found no other treatment of these connections.

PART 1: WARS OF WORDS

As a source for Gandalf, Tolkien borrows features of Beowulf's personality for his characterization of the wizard. The first similarity to be examined is the manner in which the heroes deal with contentious cynics. C. M. Bowra states that heroic tales are often concerned with the arrivals and departures of heroes. Generally, the hero is enthusiastically welcomed (B 179). However, there are times when a hero meets anything but a cordial reception (B 182). In both *Beowulf* and *The Two Towers*, a hero must react to a contentious greeting; Beowulf encounters Unferth and Gandalf contends with Grima Wormtongue.

In *Beowulf*, we are told that the monstrous Grendel issues forth from his lair in the moors every night to prey upon the men in King Hrothgar's mead-hall, Heorot. Twelve years of Grendel's bloody abandon have severely reduced the ranks of the Danish warriors, and have left King Hrothgar in the depths of despair. Across the sea, in the land of the Geats, Beowulf hears of the Danes' plight and resolves to slay Grendel. Upon Beowulf's arrival in Heorot, Hrothgar holds a feast. During the banquet, Unferth, Hrothgar's counsellor, sits at the foot of the king's throne and addresses Beowulf. The poet states that Unferth *onband beadu-rune* (unbound a battle-rune, l. 501). E. Talbot Donaldson translates the phrase as "unbound words of contention" (9). Indeed, Unferth's very name translates into "strife." The counsellor states:

Eart þu sē Beowulf,
Art thou the Beowulf,

se þe wið Breca wunne.
 that with Breca contended,
 on siðne sæ
 on the wide sea
 ymb sund flite,
 about swimming disputed,
 ðær git for wlence
 where you two for pride
 wada cunneðon
 went to compete
 ond for dol-glipe
 and for arrogant fame
 on dēop wæter
 on deep water
 aldrum nēðdon?
 lives risked?
 Ne inc ænig mon,
 Not you two any man,
 nē lēof nē lad,
 not friend nor foe,
 belēan mihte
 could dissuade
 sorh-fullne sið,
 from sorrowful deed,
 þa git on sund rēon;
 when you two were on water wild;
 þær git ēagor-strēam
 where you two the sea-flood
 earmum þehton,
 with arms embraced,
 mæton mere-stræta
 measured the sea-road
 mundum brugdon,
 with grasping hands,
 glidon ofer gār-secg....
 slipping over the stormy sea....

(ll. 506-515⁸)

Patricia Silber notes several "verbs of contention" in this passage: *wunnan*, *flitan*, *cunneðon*, and *nedan*.⁹ By using these verbs, Unferth implies that Beowulf is a brash and overly ambitious young man. Also within this passage, Unferth suggests that Beowulf lacks good judgment in refusing the advice of other less adventurous men. The counsellor emphasizes foolhardiness with such pejorative terms as "water wild," "sea-flood," and "stormy seas." On the storm-tossed waves, Unferth uses images of futility, as he describes the two swimmers "embracing" the unembraceable waves, and measuring "the sea-road with grasping hands."

Unferth continues to accost the Geat and claims that Breca overcame Beowulf in the seven-day duel upon the sea. The sharp-tongued counsellor then declares that only worse results can be expected of Beowulf's battle with

Grendel. As Silber points out, with a stinging "if" clause, Unferth dares the Geat to confront Grendel (S 478). The antagonist challenges Beowulf, stating "if you dare to abide night-long here with Grendel near" (ll. 527-528).

As befitting a hero, Beowulf is not slow to respond to Unferth's allegations. The Geat counters with the "skill, energy, and complete control of rhetorical and logical qualities such a debate demands" (S 481). Beowulf states:

Hwæt þu worn fela,
 What many things
 wine mīn Unferð,
 my friend Unferth,
 beore druncen
 drunk with beer
 ymb Breca spræce,
 you about Breca speak
 sægest from his siðe.
 sayest of his deeds.
 Sōð ic talige
 Truly I speak
 þæt ic mere-strengo
 that I sea-strong
 mārān āhte,
 mightier rate,
 earfeþo on yþum,
 hardship on waves,
 ðonne ænig oþer man.
 than any other man.
 Wit þæt gecwædon
 I know that you say
 cniht-wesende
 youth-being
 ond gebēotedon-
 and boasting-
 wæron bēgen þa git
 were both then we two
 on geogoð-fēore-
 young in life-
 þæt wit on gār-secg ūt
 there we two on stormy-sea ventured
 aldrum nēðdon
 lives risked
 ond þæt gæfnðon swā.
 and there we performed the same.
 Hæfdon swurd nacod,
 We had naked swords,
 þa wit on sund rēon,
 when we two were on water wild,
 heard on handa....
 strong in hands....

(ll. 530-540)

In regard to Beowulf's response, Silber notes that in contrast to Unferth, the hero uses verbs of "speaking or thinking rather than contention" (S 476). The Geat uses such verbs as *sprecan*, *italian*, *cwedan*, and *gebeotian*. The verb *gebeotian*, or to boast, is one that we might be tempted to associate with contention. It is significant that Beowulf supports the boast two lines later, for he states "ond þæt geoeofndon swa," which Howell Chickering translates as "and we did as we said."¹⁰ Beowulf's declaration of "we did as we said" is an affirmation of the hero's personal concerns with honor and courage. Beowulf has both the honor to fulfill his avowals and the courage to pursue them actively. Consequently, Beowulf negates his antagonist's version of the contest, for Unferth views the match as nothing more than youthful folly.

In this passage, Beowulf displays restraint rather than brashness, for he addresses the counsellor as "my friend Unferth." In addition, the hero dismisses the words of the antagonist as the words of one drunk and accountable. Still, Beowulf asserts that he speaks "Truly," as he relates his version of the swimming match. The Geat, with descriptive terms such as "sea-strength," "mightier," "hardship," and "strong in hands," emphasizes the endurance necessary to complete such a feat. Beowulf points out that they carried "naked swords." So in addition to the relentless and taxing forces of storm-tossed seas, he had to contend with a burdensome sword.

As the hero continues his version of the duel, he states that the ordeal lasted not seven days, as Unferth said, but rather five. By doing so, Beowulf presents Unferth as an exaggerating and unreliable source. The Geat goes on to stress the point that Breca was the weaker swimmer of the two. Beowulf protects Breca and states that he would not have left Breca's side had not the waves driven them apart. After the separation, Beowulf intensifies the ordeal for his audience by describing his defense against cruel sea-monsters. Having defeated the monsters, the hero is finally borne by the waters to friendly shores. Beowulf then calls attention to Unferth by stating that he has never heard of any brave deeds performed by his hand. On the contrary, the hero states, the counsellor has treacherously murdered his own brothers. Beowulf claims that Unferth, in spite of his cleverness, will suffer damnation in hell for that dark deed.

Beowulf then transposes the use of the "if" clause and with it he sharply reprimands Unferth. The hero states:

Secge ic þe to soðe,
Say I to you truly,
sunu Ecglafe,
son of Ecglafe,
þæt næfre Grendel swā fela
that never would have Grendel so much
gyra gefremede,
terror accomplished,
atol æglaeca
evil monster

ealdre þinum,
against your lord,
hynðo Heorote,
insulting Heorot,
gif þin hige wære,
if your courage was,
sefa swā searo-grim,
heart as fighting-grim,
swa þu self talast....
as your own speech....

(ll. 590-594)

In other words, Beowulf accuses Unferth of being "all show and no go."

Beowulf closes his speech with a resolve to match his verbal prowess with the "courage and strength / of the Geats in combat" (C 85). Once again the hero stresses that he is a man of action, and vows to exterminate Grendel. So pleasing is the Geat's performance of words and the promise of hope that the despairing King Hrothgar and his whole hall rejoice. The poet states:

Then was pleased
the treasure giver
grayed with age and war-famed;
he believed in the help
lord of the Bright Danes,
he heard in Beowulf
nation's guardian
the steadfast resolution.
There was warriors' laughter,
a pleasing din,
the words were pleasant.

(ll. 607-612)

According to Silber, Beowulf's speech is a worthy example of Cicero's fourth method of refutation, which recommends that one "counter a strong argument with one equally strong or stronger" (S 481). If Beowulf were to retain his integrity, he would need to counter Unferth's allegations with an impressive rebuttal, for according to Jan De Vries, honor and fame were the hero's "first and foremost" concerns.¹¹ If men sought fame in those days, they feared blame more than they desired fame (DV 185). The possibility of losing face was not only a threat to an individual, but

fame and blame were transmitted to children and grandchildren, or reached back to their ancestors. The man who failed in his honor was a weak link in the chain; it could snap. He dragged his whole race down with him in dishonour.... (DV 187)

Beowulf's confrontation with a cynic provides an analogue for a contentious meeting between a hero and a spiteful spokesman in Tolkien's *The Two Towers*. The exchange between Gandalf, the heroic wizard, and the malignant counsellor Grima Wormtongue is similar to that of Beowulf and Unferth. Gandalf, in the company of three friends, arrives at the hall of King Théoden. Théoden's

lands border those of the evil wizard, Saruman, who has greedy designs on Middle-earth, hoping to subjugate all the lands and their inhabitants by acquiring the One Ring of unspeakable power. Unknown to Théoden, his own counsellor, Grima Wormtongue, is in league with Saruman. Grima has filled the mind of Théoden with deceitful words of despair, reducing the king to a state of defenselessness and anxiety. "Grima" is a fitting name for such a counsellor, for the name is the Anglo-Saxon rendering of "mask."¹² Gandalf knows the basic struggle of the situation, and like Beowulf, he arrives at the king's hall to render aid. Because he considers Gandalf a threat to his ambitions, Wormtongue has swayed Théoden with false accusations about the wizard.

As a result, the king is less than courteous in his reception of Gandalf and company. Gandalf and his friends enter the hall, where Grima, like Unferth, is seated at the throne's foot. The hero addresses the king with a proclamation of the reality of the situation. Gandalf exclaims, "Hail Théoden son of Thengel! I have returned! For behold! the storm comes, and now all friends should gather together, lest each singly be destroyed."¹³ Théoden responds by calling the wizard a "herald of woe" and gives him the nickname "Stormcrow" (TT 149).

Grima interposes and states that the king has spoken justly. The counsellor continues with a series of insults, stating:

Such is the hour in which this wanderer chooses to return. Why indeed should we welcome you, Master Stormcrow? Lathspell I name you, Illnews; and ill news is an ill guest they say. (TT 149)

Gandalf counters with sarcasm. In the same way that Beowulf calls his antagonist "my friend Unferth," Gandalf addresses the counsellor as "my friend Wormtongue" (TT 149). In addition, the wizard sardonically calls Grima "a great support" to his king (TT 149). Gandalf proceeds by not denying that he brings bad tidings, but rather by justifying his news. The hero states:

Yet in two ways may a man come with evil tidings. He may be a worker of evil; or he may be such as leaves well alone, and comes only to bring aid in time of need. (TT 149-150)

The implication is that Gandalf and his friends belong to the latter group.

The battle of words continues, as Wormtongue again insults not only the wizard, but those in his train. Grima states:

That is so, but there is a third kind: pickers of bones, meddlers in other men's sorrows, carrion-fowl that grow fat on war. What aid have you ever brought, Stormcrow? And what aid do you bring now...? Do you bring horses, swords, spears? That is what I would call aid; that is our present need. But who are these that follow at your tail? Three ragged wanderers in grey, and you yourself the most beggar-like of the four! (150)

Besides insulting the visitors, Grima has reinforced the king's attitude toward Gandalf by calling him "Stormcrow" — the nickname invented by Théoden himself — for the second time.

In addition, Grima has used the nickname to strengthen his own standing with the king. In other words, Wormtongue is "brown-nosing." Grima has also hypocritically dug his own grave, by describing the visitors as "pickers of bones, meddlers in other men's sorrows, carrion-fowl." When Gandalf later exposes Grima's true allegiance to the evil Saruman, he claims that when Théoden is defeated, Wormtongue is to have a "share of the treasure" and "take the woman" he desires (TT 159). Thus is Grima a "carrion-fowl" picking through the spoils of war.

Gandalf retaliates by appealing to the king's sense of courtesy, and by defending his companions' integrity. The wizard asserts:

The courtesy of your hall is somewhat lessened of late, Théoden son of Thengel. Has not the messenger from your gate reported the names of my companions? Seldom has any lord of Rohan received three such guests. Weapons they have laid at your doors that are worth many a mortal man, even the mightiest... and they have passed through the shadow of great perils to your hall. (TT 150)

Gandalf explains that his friends have recently passed through the realm of the fair lady Galadriel. Grima insults the lady; Gandalf loses his patience and exclaims, "I have not passed through fire and death to bandy crooked words with a serving man..." (TT 151). The wizard raises his magical staff, which causes the fires in the hall to extinguish and creates a roll of thunder and lightning that sends Wormtongue sprawling to the floor on his face.

For the first time since his initial greeting to Théoden, Gandalf converses with the king without interference. In the heroic spirit of Beowulf, who offers aid to the Danes, Gandalf offers to help Théoden. The wizard asks, "Do you ask for help...? Not all is dark. Take courage, Lord of the Mark; for better help you will not find" (TT 151). With these words of hope, Gandalf takes Théoden out-of-doors to speak with him privately. The wizard's words of encouragement affect the king mentally and physically. As the king leaves the hall with the wizard, Théoden's niece is anxious for his safety. Théoden tells her, "The time for fear is past" (TT 152). Now the king, instead of being so bent by the despairing, deceitful words of Grima that he "seemed almost a dwarf" (TT 148), "Now tall and straight he stood" (TT 153).

Like the words of Beowulf, Gandalf's words affect not only the king, but also the men of the hall. Reminiscent of Beowulf's statement of action, "we did as we said," (C 81) Gandalf advises Théoden "to do the deed at hand" (TT 156). The king chants the call to arms. The thanes respond to the summons and stand in amazement at the king's metamorphosis. Collectively the men exclaim, "'Command us!'" Eomer, the nephew of Théoden, states, "'It is a joy to us to see you return into your own. Never again shall it be said, Gandalf, that you come only with grief!'" (TT 155)

Grima enters the picture again and tries to reduce

Théoden to his former pitiful state with words of weakness. Wormtongue tells the king, "But do not weary yourself, or tax too heavily your strength" (TT 157). Being unsuccessful in this attempt, the counsellor claims that Gandalf has "bewitched" the king (TT 157). Théoden then instructs Grima to ride at his side into battle. The counsellor prefers to stay behind in the safety of the hall. Like Unferth, Grima is a man of many words, yet a man of no action. Gandalf again loses his patience, and for the first time, he reveals Wormtongue's true allegiance. The wizard exclaims, "Down snake! Down on your belly! How long has it been since Saruman bought you? What was the promised price?" (TT 169) Grima accuses the wizard of lying. Like Beowulf, who stresses truthfulness, Gandalf answers, "I do not lie" (TT 159). Théoden gives Grima an ultimatum: either remain at his side in battle, or leave the land. At these words Grima flees. The battle-eager host rides to meet the forces of Saruman and defeats them at the Battle of Helm's Deep. Gandalf the wizard, like Beowulf the warrior hero, has won a battle of words.

PART 2: STORIES OF STRUGGLES

Yet another aspect of Beowulf's conduct provides an origin for the heroic character of Gandalf. Both of the heroes describe their own versions of a battle with a monster in a very similar fashion. According to Bowra, a "special dramatic device" used in heroic poems is that in which a hero tells a story in the first person (B 34). The effect of the hero's tale makes the audience "feel that it listens to some important participant in a great crisis and enjoys a first-hand account of it" (Bowra 33). Beowulf presents such an account of a "great crisis" to King Hygelac. Analogous to Beowulf's tale is the episode in *The Two Towers* in which Gandalf relates his battle with a Balrog to his companions.

After Beowulf's confrontation with Unferth, he fulfills his vow to face the monster Grendel. The very same night, when the men have retired to their beds, Grendel raids the hall in which Beowulf sleeps. After Grendel consumes one victim, the hero and the fiend grapple. Beowulf rips an arm from Grendel's body and the monster flees to his lair to die. The next morning brings a day of mirth and celebration amongst the Danes. But the joy is short-lived, for with the night comes Grendel's dam thirsting for revenge. The she-monster slays Hrothgar's most beloved retainer. The following morning Beowulf consoles Hrothgar with promises of revenge. The hero meets the monster in her subterranean lair and slays her. Having fulfilled his promises, the Geat returns to his home over the sea. Upon Beowulf's return to his native land, King Hygelac asks the hero about his adventures. Beowulf then gives an account of his deeds in the first person.

As Hygelac listens, Beowulf begins his tale thus:

þæt is undyrne
That is no secret
dryhten Hygelac
lord Hygelac

mæru gemetung
our famous meeting
monegum fira,
to many people,
hwylc orleg-hwil
what sort of battle-time
uncer Grendles
we two Grendel and I
wearð on ðam wange....
made in that place....

(ll. 2000-2003)

In this passage Beowulf stresses the fact that the encounter is well known to many people. As a warrior "mindful of fame," the renown of the deed undoubtedly satisfies Beowulf greatly (D 47).

With the use of the first person the hero also emphasizes the contention of opposing wills with "what sort of battle-time we two Grendel and I / made in that place...." "Battle-time" suggests intense fighting. "We two Grendel and I" gives one the impression that for a moment the conflict between all that is good and all that is evil is focused solely in that duel. After this introduction to the battle, Beowulf describes the generosity of King Hrothgar and also digresses with the story of Ingeld and Freawaru.

Beowulf picks up the action once more in line 2069, stating, "Now let me turn / again to Grendel...." (C 171). The Geat describes how Grendel devoured the thane Hondsco. Next, bent on destruction, the monster seized Beowulf. The hero states,

Tō lang ys tō recenne,
Too long it is to tell
hū ic ðam lēod-sceaðan
how I that man-harmer
yfla gehwylces
who plagued everyone
hond-lēan forgeald
hand-payment exchanged
þær ic, peoden mīn,
there I, my lord
þīne lēode
for your people
weorðode weorcum.
honor wrought.
He on weg losade,
He upon his path fled,
lȳtle hwīle
for a little while
līf-wynna brēc....
life-pleasures enjoyed....

(ll. 2092-2097)

Beowulf stresses the duration of the fight by stating "too long it is to tell." The "man-harmer / who plagued every-

one" implies that the hero is facing man's ills, such as death, sin, hate, pain, etc., personified.

Next Beowulf presents an image of grappling or hand-to-hand combat with "hand-payment exchanged." Eventually the hero's physical strength is too much for Grendel. The monster receives a mortal wound and flees. With the wound Grendel's survival is short-lived. Before dying, the fiend enjoys "life-pleasures" for a "little while."

Following this portion of the tale, Beowulf describes the Danes' celebration of the next day. But with darkness comes sorrow again, for Grendel's dam stalks from the moors, seeking revenge. In her wrath she slays a retainer of Hrothgar's. Afterwards the hideous mother returns to her mere. In the morning, Beowulf vows revenge and travels to the mere's edge.

From the mere's shore, the hero dives into the hellish waters. There he encounters the she-monster who drags him to her lair. Beowulf tells Hygelac,

Ic ðā ðæs waelmes,
I then in those depths,
pē is wide cūð
this is widely known
gimne gýrelcne
the grim, terrible
grund-hýrde fonde.
abyss-guardian found.
þær unc hwīle wæs
There we two for a long time
hand gemāne;
hands joined;
holm heolfe weōll,
sea blood boiled
ond ic hēafde becearf
and I cut off the head
in ðam gūð-sele
in that battle-hall
Grendles mōðor
of Grendel's mother
ærcum ecgum;
with a great sword; e
unsōfte þonan
not easily from there
feorh oðferede.
I brought my life away.
Næs ic fæge þā gýt....
Not was I doomed yet....

(ll. 2135-2141)

In the preceding lines, the use of the first person "I" emphasizes Beowulf's aloneness. *Waelmes* and *grund* impart an image of dark deepness, thus magnifying Beowulf's aloneness. In this place of isolation and dark-

ness, the hero contends with the "grim, terrible" dam, evil again personified.

The remainder of the passage describes the fight. The long duration of intense hand-to-hand combat is once more stressed with Beowulf's statement: "we two for a long time hands joined." So violent is the struggle that the sea boils with blood. Eventually the Geat overcomes the she-monster. With a triumphal "I," Beowulf declares, "I cut off the head ... of Grendel's mother." But it is not without much hardship that Beowulf slays the fiend, for he admits that he barely escapes with his life. The hero states: "not easily from there I brought my life away." In saying this, Beowulf admits his vulnerability to the power of death. The Geat closes the passage, stating, "Not was I doomed yet...." This line acknowledges Beowulf's susceptibility to yet another power — the power of destiny.

Tolkien superimposes these heroics of Beowulf onto the character of Gandalf. In the same way that Beowulf tells of the battles fought against Grendel and the foul dam, the embodiments of evil, Gandalf describes a battle fought against a Balrog, evil again personified. In *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Gandalf and company pursue their quest to destroy the evil Ring of power. Their journey requires that they pass through the mines of Moria. In these dark tunnels they are attacked by sinister orcs. The orcs are joined in battle by a Balrog, a formidable monster of evil. As the company flees over the narrow bridge of Khazad-dûm, Gandalf stays behind to prevent the Balrog's passage. Gandalf destroys the bridge beneath the monster's feet as it crosses over. The Balrog plunges into the abyss, and with a final blow it lashes out at Gandalf with a whip, entangles him in the thongs, and drags the wizard with it into the chasm. The company escapes without any hope of Gandalf's survival. Later, in *The Two Towers*, three of the company, Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli, unexpectedly encounter Gandalf at the edge of the forest Fangorn. The three companions ask the wizard about his fall with the Balrog. With elements analogous to those found in Beowulf's tale, Gandalf tells his story of a "great crisis" in the first person.

Gandalf begins his story of this encounter with evil: "Long time I fell," he said at last slowly, as if thinking back with difficulty. 'Long I fell, and he fell with me' (TT 134). Reminiscent of Beowulf, who states, "we two for a long time hands joined," Gandalf asserts that the battle with the Balrog required a lot of time. The wizard continues: "His fire was about me. I was burned. Then we plunged into the deep water and all was dark. Cold it was as the tide of death: almost it froze my heart..." (TT 134). Like Beowulf and Grendel's dam, Gandalf and the Balrog fight in the dark depths of water. Gandalf too admits his vulnerability to death, describing the water as cold as death, chilling his heart.

The two opponents persist thus until, as Gandalf states,

Thither I came at last, to the uttermost foundations of stone. He was with me still. His fire was quenched, but now he was a thing of slime, stronger than a strangling

snake. We fought far under the living earth.... (TT 134)

As the wizard states, the two fought at the "utmost foundation of stone." Paralleling this statement, Beowulf uses the word *grund* in line 2136, which translates into "ground," "abyss," or "foundation." Like Beowulf, Gandalf battles a monster in subterranean depths so deep that the "foundations of stone" support the world.

Continuing the tale, the wizard reminds the audience that the Balrog is totally evil, and even though its fire has been quenched, it is now a disgusting "thing of slime, stronger than a strangling snake." In the fashion of Beowulf's story-telling, the wizard suggests that the war between all that is good and all that is evil is concentrated in the struggle. Thus he states in the first person, "we fought far under the living earth...."

The battle continues to rage on:

Ever he *clutched* me and ever I *hewed* him, till at last he fled into dark tunnels.... In that despair, my enemy was my only hope, and I pursued, *clutching* at his heel. Thus he brought me back at last to the secret ways of Khazad-dûm: too well he knew them all. Ever up now we went, until we came to the Endless Stair. ... From the lowest dungeon to the highest peak it climbed, ascending in unbroken spiral in many thousand steps, until it issued at last in Durin's Tower carved in the living rock of Zirakzigil, the pinnacle of the Silvertine. There upon Celebdil was a lonely window in the snow, and before it lay a narrow space, a dizzy eyrie above the mists of the world. The sun shone fiercely there, but all below was wrapped in cloud. Out he sprang and even as I came behind, he burst into new flame. There was none to see, or perhaps in after ages songs would still be sung of the Battle of the Peak.... (134-135 italics mine)

Here Tolkien presents hand-to-hand combat. The Balrog "clutched" Gandalf and Gandalf ever "hewed him," thus echoing Beowulf's "hand-payment exchanged" with Grendel. The wizard's strength dismayed the Balrog and so it "fled into dark tunnels." Grendel, disheartened by Beowulf's determination, also "upon his path fled."

While Beowulf tells Hygelac that his meeting with Grendel "is no secret... to many people," Gandalf's struggle goes unnoticed. But the battle has been of such magnitude that if others had been aware of it, "in after ages songs would still be sung" about it. Unlike Beowulf, who is "mindful of fame" (D 47), Gandalf is not sensitive to reputation. The wizard states in *The Return of the King* that his concern is not with pride, but rather with "all worthy things that are in peril."¹⁴ Thus, it is consistent with Gandalf's personality that the battle goes unnoticed.

Gandalf concludes the conflict, stating:

I threw down my enemy, and he fell from that high place and broke the mountain-side where he smote it in his ruin. Then darkness took me, and I strayed out of thought and time, and I wandered far on roads that I will not tell. Naked I was sent back - for a brief time, until my task is done.... I was alone, forgotten (135)

Like Beowulf, who asserts in the resounding first-person, "I cut off the head ... of Grendel's mother," Gandalf triumphantly declares, "I threw down my enemy...." These statements avow that it is only through the heroes' self-sufficient power of mind and limb, without any outside help, that they are able to overcome their foes. Indeed, by superimposing the heroics of Beowulf over Gandalf, Tolkien presents the wizard as more than "an old bent man, leaning on a staff" (TT 55). Gandalf's muscular heroism would rival the youthful physical prowess of Beowulf.

Following his victory over the Balrog, the wizard's allusion to destiny is analogous to Beowulf's reference to the same. Gandalf states that he was "sent back - for a brief time" until his "task is done." Likewise, Beowulf states after his victory over the she-monster, "Not was I doomed yet...." In these statements both of the heroes recognize that a powerful force — destiny or fate, directs their lives. Chickering explains the Anglo-Saxon concept of destiny or *wyrd*:

The Anglo-Saxons believed that life was a struggle against insuperable odds and that a man's *wyrd* or "lot" would be what it would be.... *Wyrd* originally meant simply "what happens...." (C 269)

In regard to Tolkien's use of destiny, Ruth Noel asserts:

Literature based on a belief of predestined fate provides a sense of inevitability and of man's subordination to forces beyond his control. Both myth and Tolkien's works are based on this concept of destiny.¹⁵

Gandalf then closes the tale with images of isolation. Loneliness, as in Beowulf's tale, is magnified with darkness. The wizard further enhances isolation with disorientation, for he "wandered" and "strayed out of thought and time." In this predicament he is truly "alone and forgotten."

PART 3: THE LANGUAGE OF LOYALTY

Other elements in Tolkien's sources contribute to a new heroic dimension of Sam, Frodo's faithful companion. Sam has a source in Wiglaf, Beowulf's loyal comrade during the dragon fight. According to Peter R. Stillman, a hero is often accompanied by a companion who is motivated by a "simple devotion" to the champion.¹⁶ Because of their devotion, Wiglaf and Sam perform deeds of daring and use heroic language, thus making them heroes in their own right. Wiglaf, who aids Beowulf in his fight against the dragon, provides an analogue for Sam, who accompanies Frodo on the perilous journey to Mount Doom.

After Beowulf returns to his native land, the poet chronicles the events which eventually lead to the hero's ascension to the throne. Beowulf rules the Geats for fifty peaceful years. One day a Geat servant steals a golden cup from a dragon's hoard. The enraged monster lays waste to Beowulf's kingdom. The champion resolves to slay the *lingworm* on his own, for though he has aged in body his fighting spirit is still youthful. The poet says of Beowulf, "Then the ring-giver scorned to approach / the dragon

with troops..." (C 190-191). Only twelve men accompany the hero to the vicinity of the worm's lair. At a safe distance, Beowulf leaves them to wait, stating, "Nis þæt eower sið, / nē gemet mannes, nefne mīn ānes..." or "This is not your deed, / nor any man's except mine alone..." (ll. 2532-2533). The hero proceeds alone to the mouth of the dragon's den and calls out the beast. The dragon comes; enraged, it envelops Beowulf in flames. The Geats, watching from their safety, panic and flee - save one, Wiglaf the son of Weohstan. Of Wiglaf the poet writes:

Remembered he then the favors
that he [Beowulf] gave him,
the rich homesteads
of the Waegmundings,
folk-fitting each,
such as his father owned;
he could not hold back,
he seized his hand shield,
yellow linden-wood;
he drew his ancient sword....

(ll. 2606-2610)

As the others flee, Wiglaf rebukes them, exclaiming:

īc ðæt mǣl geman
ī that time remember
þær wē medu þēgum
when we partook mead
þonne wē gehēton
when we vowed
ūssum hlāford
to our lord
in bīor-sele,
in the beer-hall,
ðē ūs ðās bēagas geaf,
who to us these treasures gave,
þæt wē him ðā guð-geþāwa
that we would repay him
gyldan woldon,
for this battle-armor,
gif him þyslicu
if to him such
þearf gelumpe,
harm should come
helmas on heard sword.
the helms and hard swords.

(ll. 2633-2638)

In these lines Wiglaf appeals to the others' sense of obligation to their lord as required by a *comitatus*. As we shall later see, another aspect of Sam's character appears in his connection with the *comitatus* tradition. A *comitatus* was a member of a band of Germanic warriors committed to a lord. The lord had to be a "great fighter" and a "generous giver of feasts and treasures" in order to maintain the warriors' loyalty. In exchange for these pleasures, a war-

rior owed the lord his devotion unto death. Should the leader be killed, the warrior was expected to show a "reckless disregard for his life" while avenging the chieftain's death. This was the spirit of *comitatus*.¹⁷

Wiglaf recalls the revelry of the *comitatus* in the mead-hall. Thus the warrior reminds his comrades that the feasting and drinking were at Beowulf's expense. Not only did their lord supply leisurely times but, as Wiglaf reminds them, he provided the men with the swords and other wargear with which to preserve those carefree occasions. By freely giving weapons, treasures, lands and fun, Beowulf fulfills his duty as demanded by the *comitatus* tradition. Recalling these events, Wiglaf appeals to the warriors' sense of guilt. He entreats them to uphold their obligation to Beowulf as *comitatus*; after all, they had vowed to go to his aid if "to him such harm should come."

Wiglaf continues his call to arms, stating,

Nū is sē dæg cumen
Now has the day come
þæt ūre man-dryhten
that our liege-lord
mægenes behōfað,
has need of strength,
gōdra gūð-rinca;
the good battle-warrior;
wutun gongan tō,
let us go to him,
helpan hild-fruman,
help our war-leader,
þenden hyt sý,
while the heat is
glēd-egesa grim!
fire-terror fierce!
God wāt on mec
God knows of me
þæt mē is micle lēofre
that to me is more preferable
þæt mīnne līc-haman
that my body
mīd mīnne gold-gyfan
with my gold-giver
glēd fæðmie.
the flame embrace.

(ll. 2646-2652)

Here the loyalthane states that the time has come to render aid. Once again Wiglaf appeals to their obligation as *comitatus* by reminding them that Beowulf is their generous and brave king. Wiglaf does this with titles like "liege-lord," "battle-warrior," "war-leader," and "gold-giver." With an affirmation of his own loyalty, Wiglaf declares that he had rather die beside his lord than flee. Wiglaf then charges into the dragon's flames.

When Wiglaf arrives at Beowulf's side, he urges the king on. Wiglaf states,

Lēofa Biōwulf,
Beloved Beowulf,
læst eall tela,
perform all things well,
swā ðū on geoguð-fēore
as you in youth-time
geāra gecwæde,
long ago said,
þæt ðū ne ālæte
that you would not allow
be ðē lifigendum
while living
dōm gedreōsan;
glory to decline;
scealt nū dædum rōf,
must now with famous deeds,
æðeling ān-hȳdig,
resolute prince,
ealle maegene
with all strength
feorh ealgian;
life protect;
ic ðe ful-læstu.
I will help you to the full.

(ll. 2663-2668)

In the preceding passages directed towards the eleven craven comrades, the failure of *comitatus* is obvious. *Comitatus* is not reason enough for the thanes to expose themselves to the agonizing pain of flames. Wiglaf goes to Beowulf not out of a sense of *comitatus*, but out of compassion and love. The faithful retainer addresses Beowulf as *leofa* (dear, beloved), terms associated with affection. Thus Beowulf is no longer only a "liege-lord," "war-leader," or "gold-giver," but he is one so beloved of Wiglaf that the thane is willing to lay down his life for the imperiled king. Reinforcing the bond of love is the fact that the poet refers to Beowulf as Wiglaf's *mæges* (kinsman) in lines 2675 and 2698.

Wiglaf continues the passage by addressing the scorched king with words of encouragement, reminding Beowulf that he has always been a man of action, not a man of empty, idle words. Wiglaf closes his speech with an exclamation of support. The companion avows, "I will help you!" (C 209) With renewed determination, Beowulf, with Wiglaf's aid, attacks and slays the lingworm. Beowulf soon thereafter dies, a victim of the dragon's venomous bite, and leaves Wiglaf to carry on the duties of kingship.

Likewise, Tolkien provides his heroes with loyal companions. Kathryn Crabbe asserts that Tolkien's heroes are "selfless in their love for their companions."¹⁸ Of special note is Frodo's faithful companion Sam Gamgee. Sam possesses an "unwavering determination" not to let Frodo

pursue a dangerous quest alone (CT 83). Sam's selfless dedication to Frodo, in the language and spirit of *comitatus*, courses throughout the trilogy.

In *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Frodo inherits from his uncle Bilbo the One Ring of power. The Ring originally belonged to its creator, the Dark Lord Sauron. With the Ring in his possession the Dark Lord is virtually invincible, for the Ring embodies all the forces of evil. However, by the superior forces of good, Sauron has been deprived of the Ring. A series of mishaps leads to Bilbo's accidental acquisition of the Ring. Although Bilbo is the keeper of the Ring for several years, he is ignorant of the true nature of the treasure. The Ring is nothing more than a magical device that renders the hobbit invisible when he slips it on his finger. Gandalf is suspicious of the Ring's power. Out of concern for the hobbit's well-being, the wizard advises Bilbo to go on a journey and to leave the Ring behind with Frodo. The wizard's suspicions are well founded, for Bilbo, because of the treasure's evil nature, had become possessive of the Ring and is reluctant to give it up. It is only at Gandalf's persuasion that Bilbo finally relinquishes the Ring.

After Frodo acquires the Ring, Gandalf later learns the true identity and nature of the treasure. The wizard relates the Ring's history to the hobbit. Even as Gandalf speaks, the Dark Lord is again growing in power and greatly desires to make the Ring his own again as soon as he locates it. Black Riders, Sauron's henchmen, scour the land in search of the treasure. Frodo earnestly wishes to destroy the Ring in order to put it beyond Sauron's grasp forever. Gandalf tells Frodo that the Ring can only be unmade in the fiery Cracks of Doom which lie in the very heart of Sauron's realm, Mordor. If Frodo really wishes to go through with this mission, Gandalf advises him to take a companion. The wizard states,

... I don't think you need to go alone. Not if you know of anyone you can trust, and who would be willing to go by your side - and that you would be willing to take into unknown perils.¹⁹

Frodo finds his companion in the likes of Sam Gamgee, a hobbit eager to see the wonders of the world in spite of its perils.

Frodo and Sam leave the comforts of their homes in the Shire to fulfill their quest. Attending them for part of the journey are two other hobbits, Merry and Pippin. Pippin thinks that Sam is a rather clumsy companion to have for such a perilous trip, but nevertheless he recognizes Sam's priceless loyalty to Frodo. Pippin tells Frodo, "Sam is an excellent fellow, and would jump down a dragon's throat to save you. ..." (FR 148). Sam does not ever face the fiery breath of a dragon during the course of the quest, but one perceives that Tolkien endows Pippin with a knowledge of *Beowulf*. Sam's devotion is analogous to that of Wiglaf's, who practically does "jump down a dragon's throat" to save Beowulf.

With Sam's devotion, Tolkien reverses the role of *comitatus* and gold-giving. Indeed in *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien translates the reward of gold rings into the sacri-

fice of a gold ring. Sam's loyalty is not nurtured by gifts but is fed by concern for Frodo's well-being. For Frodo's welfare Sam chooses to help him destroy the malevolent Ring. Nor does Frodo, in the spirit of *comitatus*, lavish Sam with treasures in order to maintain his loyalty. Sam accompanies Frodo out of selfless devotion, without any desire for compensation.

As the journey continues, the hobbits rendezvous with Gandalf at the Elvish stronghold, Rivendell. After a respite, the hobbits proceed on their way allied now with Gandalf and four other companions. The company endures several obstacles and misfortunes, such as Gandalf's fall with the Balrog, until it reaches a point at which it must decide to stay intact or split up. Frodo wishes to continue to Mordor while another option is to go to the safety of the city Minas Tirith. Like the solitary Beowulf facing the dragon, Frodo wishes to go to Mordor alone, thus exposing only himself to danger. Like Wiglaf, who refuses to forsake Beowulf, Sam tells Frodo, "All alone and without me to help you? I couldn't have borne it, it'd have been the death of me" (FR 525). Frodo tries to dissuade Sam by emphasizing the fact that he intends to go right into the stronghold of the Dark Lord from which he may not return alive. Sam is not dismayed and states, "But not alone. I'm coming too, or neither of us isn't going" (FR 526). Frodo gives in and the two hobbits sneak away without the rest of the company.

Tolkien continues the tale of the two hobbits in *The Two Towers*. Frodo and Sam descend the treacherous cliffs of Eryn Mui and traverse the foul Dead Marshes, eventually arriving at the closed Black Gate of Mordor. The two hobbits then take an alternate route up the forbidding stairs of Cirith Ungol. The stairs lead to a dark cave through which the hobbits must pass. In the darkness of the tunnel the two hobbits encounter the monstrous spider Shelob. Like Beowulf, who succumbs to the dragon's poisonous fangs, Frodo is overcome by the she-monster's venomous bite. In his rage, like Wiglaf who "could not hold back," Sam attacks Shelob. Tolkien writes,

He sprang forward with a yell, and seized his master's sword in his left hand. Then he charged. No onslaught more fierce was ever seen in the savage world of beasts, where some desperate small creature armed with little teeth, alone, will spring upon a tower of horn and hide that stands above its fallen mate. (TT 428)

Sam wounds the spider, enraging it. Again in the manner of Wiglaf, who is prepared to die at Beowulf's side, Sam sees "his death in her eyes..." (TT 430). Nevertheless the defiant hobbit exclaims, "Now come, you filth! You've hurt my master, you brute, and you'll pay for it!... Come on, and taste it [his sword] again!" (TT 430). With echoes of Wiglaf, who calls Beowulf his "liege-lord," Sam refers to Frodo in the preceding quotation as "master." Sam's determination is too much for the wounded monster, so it flees.

Sam believes that Frodo is dead and resolves to complete the quest alone. As the hobbit leaves with the Ring, a company of orcs, loathsome servants of Sauron, come

upon the scene. Sam puts the Ring on his finger and becomes invisible to escape detection. The orcs find Frodo's body and decide to take it back to their fort. Mirroring a true Anglo-Saxon warrior of a *comitatus*, Sam's loyalty to his deceased master does not wane. With Frodo's body in the hands of the orcs, Sam feels obligated to recover the corpse. As the hobbit imagines the outcome of a suicidal attack upon the orcs, he tells himself:

I wonder if any song will ever mention it: How Samwise fell in the High Pass and made a wall of bodies round his master. No, no song. Of course not, for the Ring'll be found, and there'll be no more songs. I can't help it. My place is by Mr. Frodo. (TT 438)

As the orcs bear the body away, Sam learns from their conversation that Frodo is not dead but only tranquilized. Sam follows the orcs to their fort with renewed hope in an effort to rescue Frodo.

Tolkien continues the story of the hobbits in *The Return of the King*. With Frodo in the hands of the orcs, Sam, in the spirit of *comitatus*, resolves to save his fallen leader at the risk of his own life. Tolkien writes of Sam's resolution: "he must rescue his master or perish in the attempt" (RK 211). With Tolkien's consistent use of the title "master," one does indeed sense a *comitatus*-like devotion to a lord driving Sam onwards. As Tolkien soon reveals, Sam is not inspired by the higher motive of the Anglo-Saxon sense of *comitatus*, but rather by a motive of an even loftier degree. Hearing the din of orcs within the fort, Sam rushes to Frodo's aid. Tolkien writes: "His love for Frodo rose above all other thoughts..." (RK 214). Thus, like Wiglaf who rushes to his "beloved" Beowulf's side, Sam's devotion is also the fruit of genuine love. Running into almost certain death, Sam exclaims aloud, "I'm coming, Mr. Frodo!" (RK 213) With these words of encouragement, Sam's statement parallels Wiglaf's vow to Beowulf, "I will help you to the full" (l. 2668). Because of dissension amongst the orcs, Sam succeeds in saving Frodo, and they continue the quest.

PART 4: WORDS OF DUTY. WORDS OF DOOM

We also realize a new heroic dimension in Frodo when we find a source for his character in the words and actions of Sir Gawain. Gawain, of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and Frodo, of *The Lord of the Rings*, stake their lives on their word of promise as they pursue anti-quests. Bowra proposes that heroic poetry often deals with "any action in which a man stakes his life on his ideal of what he ought to be" (B 48). As heroes bent on upholding the honor of their word, both Gawain and Frodo pursue their anti-quests into the very realms of hell. Frodo voluntarily risks his life in order to cast the One Ring into the Cracks of Doom. Verlyn Flieger observes that Frodo's mission is "an anti-quest. He goes not to win something but to throw something away..."²⁰ Frodo is a reflection of Gawain whose obligation is

first and foremost one of honour in the face of death. Gawain must rise of his own volition and seek out his

own destruction simply because he has given his word to do so.²¹

Thus Gawain's mission is also an anti-quest, for he goes to throw away his own life beneath the Green Knight's axe. In the ominous face of doom, the medieval Gawain provides an analogy for Frodo as an epic hero.

The poem *Sir Gawain* opens in King Arthur's court in Camelot at the height of the Christmas festivities. Into the midst of the merrymaking rides the monstrous Green Knight upon a green horse, wielding a great green axe. Interrupting the feast, the intruder demands to speak with the lord of the court. The poet records the court's reaction:

Therefore to answer him were afraid many noble knights / And they were completely astounded at his voice and stone-still sat / In a deathly silence throughout the rich hall. (ll. 241-243)

Unafraid, King Arthur reveals that he is the ruler of the hall and he graciously welcomes the green man. The intruder refuses Arthur's generosity but proposes to play a game. The Green Knight explains that he wishes to exchange axe blows with a member of the court. This day the intruder will yield his neck voluntarily to the axe stroke if an opponent will in turn submit to the green man's swing in a year and a day, providing that the Green Knight survives the stroke. Upon hearing this proposal there is again a long silence in the hall. Without any response from the audience, the Green Knight taunts the court. Shamed by his followers' silence, Arthur takes the challenge upon himself.

As the Green Knight prepares to receive the swing from Arthur, Gawain entreats the king to allow him to take the challenge in his stead. In the humble "language of the chivalric hero,"²² Gawain states:

I am þe wakkest, I wot, and of wyt feblest,
I am the weakest, I know, and of wit feblest,
And lest lur of my lyf, who laytes þe soþe.
And least loss is my life, whoever seeks the truth.
Bot for as much as 3e ar myn em I am only to prayse;
But for as much as you are my uncle I am only worthy;
No bounte bot your blod I in my bodé knowe.
No worth but your blood do I know in my body.
And syþen þis note is so nys þt no3t hit yow falles,
And since this business is so foolish, it should not fall to you
And I haue frayed hit at yow fyrst, folde3 hit to me.
And I have asked it of you first, grant it to me.

(ll. 354-359)

In regard to Gawain's request, J. R. R. Tolkien states in his scholarly essay "*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*":

Gawain's motive is not pride in his own prowess, not boastfulness, not even the light-hearted frivolity of knights making absurd bets and vows in the midst of the Christmas revels. His motive is a humble one: the protection of Arthur ... from indignity and peril, and the risking instead of himself, the least of the knights

(as he declares) and the one whose loss could most easily be endured. He is involved therefore in the business ... as a matter of duty and humility and self-sacrifice. (GK 75)

Arthur grants Gawain his request. The noble knight promises to find the green man no matter how "hard the road" if he does indeed survive the game.²⁴ The Green Knight submits to the hero's swing of the axe and is cleanly decapitated. To the court's astonishment, the beheaded body picks up the head by the hair and proceeds to mount its horse. The severed head addresses Gawain, reminding him of his vow to seek for him in a green chapel a year and a day from now. The horse and rider then turn and gallop from the hall, disappearing as abruptly as they had appeared. Gawain and Arthur laugh nervously at the marvel and the feast resumes.

The poem continues in the second part with the famous and beautiful description of the seasons of the year, in which the stress is on the mutability of the world and on the inevitable alternation between life and death.²⁵

In this passage the poet writes:

Therefore the Yule passed by and the year after,
And each season in turn followed after the other... :
But then the weather of nature contends with winter,
Frost shrinks down, clouds rise,
Fresh falls the rain in showers warm,
Falls upon fair meadows, flowers there appear,
Both fields and the green woods are her clothing,
Birds bustle to build and loudly sing,
For delight of the soft summer that creeps thereafter
across the slopes
And blossoms swell to bloom
By hedgerows rich and lush,
Then excellent notes plentiful
Are heard in woods so fair.
But then hastens Harvest and soon becomes severe,
Warns him before the winter to grow fully ripe ... ;
And everywhere withers the grass that was green before;
Then all ripens and rots that grew at first,
And thus passes the year with many yesterdays
And winter wins again, as nature demands,
in truth,
Until Michaelmas moon
Comes with winter's challenge.
Then thinks Gawain very soon
Of his difficult journey.

(ll. 500-535)

In the preceding passage, the poet uses the passing seasons to chronicle Gawain's state of mind as he waits for his doom. The seriousness of his predicament "shrinks down" like the frost with the arrival of spring. In the spring and summer, the hero does not dwell on his obligation, but rather like the flowers, birds and trees, he lives his life to the fullest, making the most of each day. However, autumn eventually comes. In the same way that the harvest season "warns" nature to "grow fully ripe," the season also warns

Gawain that he too must seize the waning days of life. As "all ripens and rots," one perceives for the first time what John Ganim calls the "sublime pessimism of the doomed Gawain" (G 378). As the grass withers before winter's onset, so does Gawain's hope. The champion begins to dwell on his ominous anti-quest for the Green Chapel.

So the days pass by until the time for Gawain's departure arrives. On All-Saints Day Arthur orders a feast in honor of the noble knight. Despite the feast's gaiety, Gawain senses the silent sorrow of those attending. After the meal, the knight approaches Arthur with *mourning* (l. 543, mourning) and vows to leave the next day. With what Donald R. Howard refers to as "Gawain's statement of indifference to his destiny"²⁶ the hero tells Arthur:

Quat schuld I wonde?
Why should I worry?
Of destinés derf and dere
Of Destiny's dread and charm
What may mon do bot fonde?
What may man do but receive it?

(ll. 563-565)

The next morning, Gawain, "the noblest of men," is armed and ready to go (Raffel 68). Firm in his resolve to find the Green Knight, Gawain spurs his steed away from Camelot. The hero then rides through the hills and woods of England to the highlands of Wales. Gawain soon enters Wyrale, a wilderness teeming with wolves, trolls, dragons, ogres and other wild creatures with which the knight must fight. In addition to the foul beasts, Gawain contends with an even more relentless enemy, the deathly cold of winter storms. Of this setting John Speirs observes:

It is a setting from which God ... appears to have withdrawn, a landscape desolate of humans, inhabited by un-human creatures, beasts and monsters against which Gawain must hazard his life.²⁷

These forces of nature "supply mirages of doom," thus enhancing Gawain's pessimism (G 383).

Gawain continues his search until Christmas Eve. Alone and weary, the hero prays to Mary for relief. Almost immediately Gawain sights a lovely castle and rides towards it. Upon his arrival, Gawain is welcomed, fed and comforted. The champion tells the host about his mission. Determined not to tarry long and to fulfill his obligation, Gawain states:

A heȝe emde and a hasty me hade fro þo woneȝ,
A solemn and urgent errand takes me from this company,
For I am summed myselfe to sech to a place
For I am summoned to such a place
I ne wot in worlde whederwarde to wende hit to fynde.
I know not where in the world to find it

(ll. 1051-1053)

The hero then asks his host if he has ever heard of the Green Chapel. The knight also tells the host that because he must search for the Chapel he must be on his way, for he has

only three days left in which to find it. The host tells Gawain that he has indeed heard of the Green Knight and that the Chapel is less than a day's ride away. Because the place is so near, the host asks Gawain to stay the next three days at the castle. The fourth day Gawain can depart, for this will be New Year's Day, the day of his meeting with the Green Knight. The hero accepts his host's invitation and stays until New Year's morning.

New Year's Eve arrives and Gawain spends a sleepless night. The winter weather howls without, keeping the knight awake. The poet writes:

Now approaches the New Year and the night passes,
The day drives away the dark, as God bids.
But wild storms of the world awoken outdoors;
Clouds cast bitterly the cold to the earth,
with abundant bitterness from the north to torment the naked.
The snow fell bitterly, stinging the wild creatures;
The wind blowing shrilly rushed from high lands
And drove each dale full of drifts very deep.
The knight listened closely, that lay in his bed -
Though he shut his eyes, very little he slept....

(ll. 1998-2007)

Like the winter storms that torment the creatures of the wild, Gawain's mind is troubled by what he believes to be inevitable death under the Green Knight's axe. Thus, once again the poet uses the images of winter to express inescapable death, further intensifying Gawain's sense of doom as he continues his anti-quest.

With the dawning of the new day, Gawain proceeds with steadfastness. The hero prepares to leave the castle and his host supplies him with a guide to take him to the Green Chapel. The noble knight mounts his horse and spurs resolutely to his rendezvous. Of Gawain's determination to carry on with his adventure, A. C. Spearing asserts:

When he resumes his quest for the Green Chapel and leaves the luxurious castle behind there is room once more for heroism in his behaviour, and indeed he shows heroism of a particularly touching kind - not the kind that shows no fear, but the kind that overcomes a fear to which all the senses are sharpened.²⁸

As Gawain follows his guide, he finds that they are riding through a dismal, frozen, mist-veiled landscape. Again the hero's "senses are sharpened" to the inevitability of death by the scenes of lifeless winter. When the two men draw near the Green Chapel, the guide speaks to Gawain, stating:

Bot I schal say yow for soþe, syþen I yow knowe
But I shall say to you truly, since I know you
And ȝe ar a lede vpon lyue þat I wel louy:
And you are a prince on earth that I well love:

Wolde ȝe worch bi my wytte, ȝe worþed þe better.
Were you to fare by my sense, you would fare the better.

(ll. 2094-2096)

In this passage, one finds the escort endearing himself to Gawain by saying that the knight is one that he "well" loves. Because he "loves" Gawain, the guide tells him that he will give him some valuable advice.

The guide then appeals to Gawain's sense of self-preservation and declares bluntly:

Forþy I say þe: as soþe as 3e in sadel sitte,
Therefore I say to you: as certainly as you sit in a saddle,
Com 3e þere, 3e be kyllend....
If you go there, you will be killed....

(ll. 2110-2111)

Continuing to speak his mind, the guide tries to make the knight see the folly of hoping to survive an encounter with the Green Knight. If Gawain had twenty lives to live, the hero's companion declares, Gawain would still die in the Green Chapel. The guide asserts, "'Ye may not yow defend'" (You cannot defend yourself, l. 2117).

Encouraging Gawain to break his word of honor, the escort then begs the knight to turn back. The guide exclaims:

Forþy, goude Sir Gawayn, let þe gome one
Therefore, good Sir Gawain, let the man alone
And got3 away sum oþer gate, vpon Godde3 halue!
And go away by some other road, in God's name!

(ll. 2118-2119)

If the knight will only turn his back to the Green Chapel, the guide promises to keep Gawain's decision a secret, thus encouraging deceitfulness. Of the escort, W. Bryant Bachman, Jr., notes, "He is consumed by impulse, by instinctual self-preservation. There is no code or moral law on earth ... that he would risk his neck for."²⁹

Gawain thanks the escort for his concern and states that he believes that the guide would indeed keep a secret. But as the other man's opposite in ethics, Gawain declares that he will maintain his mission, stating:

Bot helde þou hit never so holde, and I here passed,
But no matter how faithfully you kept it, if I passed here,
Founded for ferde for to fle, in fourme þat þou telle3,
Hastened out of fear to flee, in the manner that you tell,
I were a kny3t kowarde, I my3t not be excused.
I would be a cowardly knight, I could not be excused.
Bot I wyl to þe chapel, for chaunce þat may falle,
But I will go to the chapel, whatever may happen
And talk wyth þat ilk tulk þe tale þat me lyste,
And meet with that same man of your tale, for it pleases me,
Worþe hit wele oþer wo, as þe Wyrde lyke3....
Whether it is for good or woe, as Fate likes....

(ll. 2129-2134)

Of Gawain's decision to go onwards to his doom, Han-nah Arendt, in *The Human Condition*, refers to Nietzsche: who "saw in the faculty of promises ... the very distinction which marks off human from animal life," and

shows how promises give men, who would otherwise be carried along helplessly in the flux of the world, some control over the future by providing "isolated islands of certainty in an ocean of uncertainty."³⁰

To Arendt's commentary, Denton Fox adds:

So Gawain, when he performs the unnatural and apparently absurd action of going into a dead land, in a dead season, to seek his own death, is in fact asserting the possibility of meaningful human action and of an enduring civilization. (F 9)

The guide answers Gawain's resolution by stating that no one will be to blame but the hero himself when he loses his life. Not intending to ride any closer to the Green Chapel, the escort gives Gawain directions to the meeting place and then departs. The hero then spurs his horse onward, continuing alone.

Riding to the edge of a glade surrounded by forbidding crags, Gawain finds not a chapel but a rounded barrow. Of this barrow, M. Mills proposes that there is "enough resemblance to a burial mound to suggest that the meeting will be fatal to the hero," thus magnifying Gawain's sense of doom.³¹ Approaching the barrow, Gawain discovers a cave within the mound. The poet describes Gawain's reaction as the hero inspects the barrow more closely:

"We! Lorde," quop þe gentyle kny3t,
"Alas! Lord," said the noble knight,
"Whether þis be þe Grene Chapelle?
"Can this be the Green Chapel?"

Here my3t aboute mydny3t
Here at about midnight might
þe Dele his matynnes telle!"
The Devil his matins say!"

"Now iwysse," quop Wowayn, "wysty is here;
"Now indeed," said Gawain, "it is desolate here;
þis oritore is vgly, with erbe3 ouergrown."
This chapel is oppressive, with plants overgrown."

(ll. 2185-2190)

M. Mills comments:

the Green Knight and Chapel can only stand for the devil and one of his works ... and the real point of the identification is to augment the already powerful sense of doom that informs this whole section. (M 92)

In light of Gawain's statement and Mills' comment, the hero's journey to the Green Chapel is a journey to hell.

As Gawain inspects the *chapel of meschaunce* (chapel of doom, l. 2195), he hears the whir of a grindstone as it sharpens a blade. The hero calls out to the unseen worker of the whetstone. The grinding stops and the Green Knight steps down from the surrounding crags, wielding a great axe. The ax-man greets the noble knight. Gawain promises to fulfill his end of the bargain and submits his bare neck to the axe's fall. As the noble knight waits for the stroke, "He tried to seem / Fearless, but his knees / Were weak" (R 118). The Green Knight feints a stroke at which Gawain flinches. The ax-man then exclaims that "You are not Gawain," (l. 2270) for he has never heard of

"such cowardice of that knight" (l. 2273).

At the Green Knight's rebuke, Gawain promises not to flinch again. Realizing that his chances of survival are practically nonexistent, the hero pessimistically states:

Bot þaȝ my hede falle on þe stones
 Even though my head falls on the stones
 I can not hit restore.
 I cannot restore it.

(ll. 2282-2283)

Impatient with the Green Knight's talk, the hero wishes to get the game over with and also states:

Bot busk, burne, bi þy fayth, and bryng me to þe poynt.
 But quickly, man by your honor, bring me to the point—
 Dele to me your destiné and do hit out of honde.
 Deal me my destiny, and do it at once.

(ll. 2284-2285)

In response to Gawain's words, the Green Knight again tests the hero's courage and feints a second stroke. This time Gawain "stood as still as stone" (l. 2293). Satisfied with Gawain's steadfastness, the ax-man raises his axe for a third time and delivers the stroke. With careful aim, the Green Knight only nicks the skin of Gawain's neck. The hero springs up in joy, draws his sword and warns the devilish knight not to attempt another swing, for Gawain states that his obligation is fulfilled. The Green Knight proclaims that not many men better than Gawain walk the earth. The ax-man explains to the noble knight that the purpose of the game was to determine the truth of the honor of King Arthur's court. The champion then refuses an invitation to celebrate New Year's Day in the castle of the Green Knight. The two opponents embrace in parting and Gawain returns to Camelot.

Frodo's senses of duty and despair parallel those of Gawain. Like Gawain, Frodo stakes his life on his word of promise. Gawain's obligation takes him on an anti-quest to the "chapel of doom" (l. 2195) while Frodo's mission requires him to go to the Cracks of Doom on Mount Doom. Thus Gawain's plight forms an analogy for Frodo's ordeal.

Frodo makes a similar journey in *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Bilbo gives the One Ring to his nephew Frodo at Gandalf's persuasion. Afterwards the elder hobbit and the wizard leave the Shire, going their separate ways. Several years later, Gandalf returns to the Shire to see Frodo. The wizard reveals the true identity of the Ring to the hobbit. Gandalf urges that some course of action be taken in regard to the Ring, for the henchmen of Sauron are at large, seeking the Ring. Aware of the danger of the circumstances, Frodo states, "... I suppose I must keep the Ring and guard it, at least for the present, whatever it may do to me" (FR 96). Realizing that for him to stay in the Shire would be to endanger his neighbors, Frodo states:

But in the meanwhile it seems that I am a danger, a danger to all that live near me. I cannot keep the Ring and stay here. I ought to leave Bag End, leave the Shire, leave everything and get away. (FR 96)

The hobbit continues his speech, stating:

I should like to save the Shire, if I could ... I feel that as long as the Shire lies behind, safe and comfortable, I shall find wandering more bearable: I shall know that somewhere there is a firm foothold, even if my feet cannot stand there again. (96)

Frodo's attitude, as revealed in the preceding passages, mirrors the attitude of Gawain. Like the chivalric Gawain, whose "motive is a humble one: the protection of Arthur ... from indignity and peril," Frodo's conviction is equally chivalric. Crabbe comments of the hobbit: "his understanding of the necessity for the quest begins with his conviction that what is good must be preserved and protected. . ." (CT 77). Thus, Frodo's protection of Camelot provides an analogy for Frodo's self-sacrificial protection of the Shire.

In the later passage, one also finds the "sublime pessimism" of Gawain present in Frodo's words. The hobbit is prepared to protect the Shire even if his feet "cannot stand there again." Frodo's pessimism is also manifested on several other occasions. In order to spare his companions from the perilous journey to Mordor, Frodo, along with Sam, sneaks away on his own. As the two hobbits leave the company behind, Frodo tells Sam, "I don't suppose that we shall ever see them again" (FR 526).

Frodo's "sublime pessimism" continues in *The Two Towers*. In this episode the two hobbits descend the treacherous height of Eryn Muil. No sooner do they overcome that obstacle than they find themselves in the reeking Dead Marshes. In the midst of the marshes, Sam shows his concern for their food supply. Sam calculates that they have only enough rations to get them to Mount Doom. Afterwards they will have no rations left. Contemplating their chances of survival, Frodo pessimistically responds:

I do not think we need to give thought to what comes after that. To do the job as you put it — what hope is there that we ever shall? And if we do, who knows what will come of that? If the One goes into the Fire, and we are at hand? I ask you, Sam, are we ever likely to need bread again? I think not. (292)

Analogous to Frodo's pessimistic, yet realistic, summation of his plight is Gawain's evaluation of his odds of surviving the ax-stroke. The hero pessimistically, yet realistically, states that when his head falls to the floor he "cannot restore it." Crabbe makes an observation of Frodo that is equally true of Gawain. She states:

Despite his fear, he has an unwavering commitment to the quest once he has undertaken it.... Most important, he is capable of carrying on when there is no hope. (CT 77)

In addition, Crabbe also asserts that Frodo's "agreement to carry the ring into Mordor and probable destruction is a triumph of the will to serve over the will to live" in spite of his negative outlook (CT 78). Frodo's "triumph" has an analogy in *Sir Gawain*. Gawain's travail in the Wyrle is equivalent to Frodo's perilous journey into Mordor and the hobbit's "probable destruction" at Mount Doom is equal to Gawain's "probable destruction" at the

"chapel of doom." Thus, in spite of his pessimism, Gawain's agreement to meet the Green Knight is, like Frodo's, a "triumph of the will to serve over the will to live."

Back in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Frodo and Gandalf make plans for Frodo's departure from the Shire. Tolkien tells us of Frodo's state of mind:

To tell the truth, he was very reluctant to start, now that it had come to the point. Bag End seemed a more desirable residence than it had for years, and he wanted to savour as much as he could of his last summer in the Shire.... He thought as little as possible about the Ring, and where it might lead him in the end. (FR 99)

In the above passage, Frodo's state of mind is similar to Gawain's as the knight waits for the time of his appointment with the Green Knight. In the seasons passage, the poet presents Gawain's enjoyment of the "delight of the soft summer" (l. 519) as he temporarily forgets his obligation. In the same fashion, Frodo tries to forget about the Ring as he savours "as much as he could of his last summer in the Shire."

The hobbit and Gandalf continue to discuss what's to be done throughout the summer when Frodo realizes that he doesn't even know the direction into which he must go. Frodo asks Gandalf, "'For where am I to go? And by what shall I steer?'" (FR 100) The hobbit's testimony of uncertainty echoes a similar profession made by Gawain. During his respite following his ride through the Wyrale, Gawain tells his host, "... I am summoned to such a place / I know not where in the world to find it" (ll. 1052-1053). The sense of uncertainty magnifies the two heroes' commitment to their missions, for they are both willing to seek out their goals no matter where that goal may be, even if it means a journey into hell.

In response to Frodo's questions, Gandalf advises the hobbit to take the Ring to the elvish stronghold of Rivendell. Two months later the wizard leaves Frodo, promising to return in time to accompany the hobbit to Rivendell. In the meantime Frodo, with the aid of Sam, Merry, and Pippin, makes preparations to leave the Shire. When Gandalf fails to appear on the appointed day of departure, Frodo becomes anxious. In addition to the anxiety caused by Gandalf's absence, "The thought that he would so soon have to part with his young friends weighed on his heart" (FR 102-103). Frodo's heavy heart parallels the "mourning" of Gawain when he tells Arthur that he must soon leave Camelot (l. 543).

The journey can no longer be delayed. Frodo, with Sam, Merry, and Pippin, sets off without Gandalf, eventually arriving at Rivendell. Here the hobbits find Gandalf waiting for their arrival. Up to this point, Frodo fulfills his commitment to bear the Ring. A confederation of men, elves, dwarves, and hobbits holds a council in order to decide what to do next with the Ring. The majority of the council decide that the One Ring should be cast into the Cracks of Doom. Bilbo, who has been residing in Rivendell ever since he left the Shire, volunteers to take the Ring to

Mordor. When the hobbit is denied the opportunity, he asks who the bearer will be. A long silence follows the question, a silence similar to the "deathly silence" that follows the Green Knight's entrance into Camelot (l. 243). Tolkien writes of the council's reaction, "No one answered. The noon-bell rang. Still no one spoke" (FR 354).

Eventually Frodo breaks the spell of muteness, stating, "'I will take the Ring,' he said, 'though I do not know the way'" (FR 354). Frodo's voluntarily acceptance of an antiquest of doom has an analogy in Gawain's acceptance of the Green Knight's challenge of doom. The "deathly silence" that precedes both of the heroes' commitment stresses the reluctance of others to assume the burden, thus elevating the champion's courage.

Following Frodo's decision, the hobbits and the council stay in Rivendell for two months while provisions are made for the journey. Tolkien writes of Frodo's respite in Rivendell:

The future, good or ill, was not forgotten but ceased to have any power over the present. Health and hope grew strong in them, and they were content with each good day as it came, taking pleasure in every meal, and every word and song. So the days slipped away, as each morning dawned bright and fair, and each evening followed cool and clear. But autumn was waning fast; slowly the golden light faded to pale silver, and the lingering leaves fell from the naked trees. A wind began to blow chill from the Misty Mountains to the east. The Hunter's Moon waxed round in the night sky, and put to flight all the lesser stars. (FR 358-359)

In the preceding passage there courses a subtle resemblance to the seasons passage of Gawain. Like Frodo and company, Gawain, in the summer before he leaves on his journey, is unaffected by the future. During the fleeting days of peace, the company of Rivendell takes pleasure in "every meal, and every word and song." Likewise, in Gawain's days of contentment, the knight finds pleasure in every blossom and bird's song. But in both Tolkien's and the poet's passages, the days of leisure are ephemeral.

As time continues to turn, the seasons change from one to another. Spring and summer yield to fall and winter. Tolkien tells us that "the days slipped away" while the poet writes that "thus passes the year with many yesterdays" (l. 529). Tolkien, like the poet, uses images of approaching winter to create a sense of impending doom. Tolkien describes the "golden light" that fades to a "pale silver," "lingering leaves" that fall from the "naked trees," the wind that begins to "blow chill" while the "Hunter's Moon" waxes round in the night sky. Indeed, when the time for leaving Rivendell comes, it is "a cold grey day near the end of December" (FR 365). Providing an analogy for these images of life-usurping winter is the Gawain poet's description of the same season. The poet describes the withering grass "that was green before" (l. 527). In addition, "all ripens and rots that grew at first" (l. 528). Eventually the "Michaelmas Moon" (l. 532), like the "Hunter's Moon," hangs wintry in the sky. For Gawain, the arrival of "winter's

challenge" signals the time for his departure from Camelot (I. 533). Thus do both of the authors underscore the heroes' destinies of doom with the arrival of winter.

The sojourn in Rivendell comes to an end, and Frodo leaves in the company of eight companions. The task of the company is to escort Frodo to the Cracks of Doom. During the course of their journey, the company experiences several mishaps. Eventually, on the river Anduin, the party arrives at a point that requires that they continue as a unit or split up. Frodo wishes to proceed on to Mordor while Boromir, one of the company, desires to have the Ring taken to the relative safety of his city, Minas Tirith. Frodo requests some time alone to consider the choices and takes a walk in the nearby woods. Boromir follows Frodo and confronts him about the choices. The man tries to persuade the hobbit to go to Minas Tirith with him.

Frodo, in reply, admits his fear, stating, "... I know what I should do, but I am afraid of doing it, Boromir: afraid!" (FR 514). Frodo's fear is in the tradition of Gawain, who is afraid to yield to the Green Knight although he never verbally admits his dread. Gawain's fear is manifested in another way, for the poet writes of Gawain as he submits to the ax-man, "He tried to seem / Fearless, but his knees / Were weak" (R 118). Thus Gawain and Frodo are imperfect heroes capable of experiencing fear. Their fear does not belittle them; in fact, their fear allows the reader to relate more readily to their plight, thus enhancing the heroes' stature in the reader's mind.

Taking advantage of Frodo's fear, Boromir tries to make the hobbit see his own point of view. The man states, "Are you sure that you do not suffer needlessly?" he said. "I wish to help you. You need counsel in your hard choice. Will you not take mine?" (FR 514) Feeling that there is no time for delay, Frodo declines Boromir's advice. The man grows impatient and begins to rant and rave about the glorious power he would have if Frodo would only give him the Ring. Boromir then calls the plan to go to Mordor "folly" (FR 516).

In response to Boromir's voiced imaginings and opinions, Frodo declares, "My mind is clearer now" (516). Not one to give up easily, Boromir tempts Frodo, stating:

"But you will come, at least for a while!" Boromir persisted. "My city is not far now; and it is little further from there to Mordor than from here. We have been long in the wilderness, and you need news of what the Enemy is doing before you make a move. Come with me, Frodo," he said. (FR 516)

Frodo again declines from taking Boromir's advice. The man now demands that the hobbit at least let him borrow the Ring. Frodo refuses, stating "The Council laid it upon me to bear it" (FR 516).

At Frodo's persistent refusals Boromir grows wrathful, exclaiming:

"It is by our own folly that the Enemy will defeat us," cried Boromir. "How it angers me! Fool! Obstinate fool! Running wilfully to death and ruining our cause." (FR 516)

Frightened by Boromir's outburst, Frodo moves away

from the impulsive man. With softer, yet deceitful words, Boromir tempts the hobbit to be free of the heavy burden of anxiety that accompanies the Ring. The man states:

"Come my friend!" said Boromir in a softer voice. "Why not get rid of it? Why not be free of your doubt and fear? You can lay the blame on me, if you will. You can say that I was too strong and took it by force." (FR 517)

With these words, Boromir suddenly springs at Frodo. The hobbit slips the Ring on his finger, becomes invisible and escapes Boromir.

The temptation of Boromir has an analogy in the temptation of Gawain by his guide to the Green Chapel. Both Boromir and the guide offer their counsel to the heroes. The guide tells Gawain, "Were you to fare by my sense, you would fare the better" (I. 2096), while Boromir tells Frodo, "I wish to help you. You need counsel in your hard choice. Will you not take mine?" Both of the tempters also try to induce the heroes to take their advice by endearing themselves to the champions. The guide tells Gawain that he is one that "I well love" (I. 2095). Likewise, Boromir endears himself to Frodo, calling the hobbit "my friend."

Another similarity between Boromir and the guide is that the counsel that they give is the same, for they both entreat the heroes to abandon their quests of doom. The escort tells Gawain to "go away by some other road" (I. 2119). Boromir implores Frodo to quit his quest and to go to Minas Tirith. The tempter states, "My city is not far now. ..."

The two tempters also appeal to the heroes' fear of death. The guide bluntly tells Gawain, "If you go there, you will be killed..." (I. 2111). On the other hand, Boromir calls Frodo a fool for "Running wilfully to death..." Neither Boromir nor the guide comprehend the heroes' self-sacrificial devotion. Bachman's observation that the guide is "consumed by impulse, by instinctual self-preservation" is equally valid for Boromir (BG 515). Guided by impulse, Boromir grows wrathful and calls Frodo an "Obstinate fool." Concerned with self-preservation, Boromir fears that Frodo's mission of destruction will, instead of being beneficial, be "ruining our cause."

Boromir's and the guide's disregard for higher motives leads them into deceit. Boromir tells Frodo that if he will give him the Ring the hobbit can tell the company that the man is at fault. The tempter encourages Frodo to lie, stating, "You can lay the blame on me, if you will. You can say that I was too strong and took it by force." Gawain's guide proposes the use of deceit as does Boromir. The guide encourages Gawain "to go away by some other road" (I. 2119). If the knight would only do this, the escort promises to "conceal this story / Forever, keep it from everyone on earth" (R 114).

Resolute in their determination to fulfill their anti-quests honorably, the two heroes dismiss the tempters' choices. Gawain tells the guide, "But I will go to the chapel, whatever may happen..." (I. 2132). Unmoved by Boromir's talk, Frodo dutifully responds, "The Council

laid it upon me to bear it." Of Frodo's decision, Spacks makes a comment that is also true of Gawain:

Frodo comes to realize that he must not refuse the burden that is laid on him; this realization is his weapon against the temptations of Boromir.... This is also what sustains him in his dreadful journey across the Land of Mordor toward the Crack of Doom.... (SP 88-89)

Indeed, this is the same sense of responsibility that is Gawain's "weapon against the temptations" of the guide. "This is also what sustains him in his dreadful journey" across the Wyrle to the "chapel of doom."

After Frodo's confrontation with Boromir, the hobbit and Sam sneak off from the rest of the company and continue the trek to Mordor. At this point *The Fellowship of the Ring* closes and the tale continues in *The Two Towers*. Frodo and Sam traverse the broken highlands of Eryn Muil. From their vantage point, Sam and Frodo see the land of Mordor for the first time in the distance. Tolkien describes Frodo's reaction, "Mordor!" he muttered under his breath. "If I must go there, I wish I could come there quickly and make an end!" (TT 266).

Frodo's statement echoes Gawain's words as he kneels before the Green Knight's axe. Gawain appeals to the knight, "But quickly, man, by your honor, bring me to the point / Deal me my destiny and do it at once" (ll. 2284-2285). Both Gawain and Frodo wish to face their doom quickly and honorably. In both of the heroes' statements one also perceives their indifference to their destinies. As a result, Gawain's language again provides an analogy for Frodo's words.

As Frodo and Sam ponder their next move, Frodo tells Sam, "It's my doom, I think, to go to that Shadow yonder, so that a way will be found. But will good or evil show it to me?" (TT 266) Once again Frodo's statement on doom, or fate, mirrors a remark made by Gawain. As the knight tells the guide that he intends to go on to the Green Chapel, he declares, "Whether it is for good or woe, as Fate likes" (l. 2134). Both Gawain and Frodo acknowledge their subjection to the decrees of fate. Those decrees may be for better or for worse. Of Tolkien's use of doom, or fate, Ruth Noel points out:

The inevitabilities of the world are glimpsed, and the courage of Tolkien's heroes, like that of the ancient heroes [for example Gawain], exists in their determination to devote all their energy to meeting that fate honorably. (N 20)

Thus does Gawain's perception of fate provide an analogy for Frodo's awareness of doom.

The story progresses with Frodo, "the famousest of hobbits," and Sam finding an entrance to Mordor (TT 408). Upon crossing the threshold into the Dark Lord's realm, Frodo and Sam contend with Shelob the spider, and Frodo is soon thereafter taken captive by evil orcs. Sam, who is not captured by the orcs, finds himself facing the task of freeing Frodo from his captors. At this point *The Two Towers* closes and *The Return of the King* begins.

Sam succeeds in rescuing Frodo and the hobbits re-

sume the search for Mount Doom. As Frodo and Sam draw nearer to their goal, the "desolation becomes hell" (CT 90). The landscape of Mordor is made up of "great heaps and hills of slag and broken rock and blasted earth, the vomit of the maggot-folk of Mordor," a vivid image of hell (RK 200). In retrospect, upon investigating the Chapel, Gawain associates the setting with hell when he claims that here might "The Devil his matins say!" (l. 2188) Mills' comment on the identification of the Green Chapel with the devil can also be applied to the connection of Mordor with hell, for Tolkien's hellish landscape also augments the "already powerful sense of doom that informs this whole section" (M 92). Consequently, analogous to Frodo's journey into hell is Gawain's journey into desolation.

Frodo and Sam finally observe their destination for the first time. Tolkien writes:

Still far away, forty miles at least, they saw Mount Doom, its feet founded in ashén ruin, its huge cone rising to a great height, where its reeking head was swathed in cloud. Its fires were now dimmed, and it stood in smouldering slumber, as threatening and dangerous as a sleeping beast. (RK 245)

Like Gawain, whose "senses are sharpened" towards fear by the winter storm the night before he goes to the Green Chapel, Frodo's "senses are sharpened" towards fear by the sight of Mount Doom. Tolkien hones the hobbit's senses by personifying the peak. Mount Doom is as "threatening and dangerous as a sleeping beast," its massive feet are "founded in ashén ruin," and with its "reeking head" it sleeps in "smouldering slumber," daring the hobbit to awaken it.

As Frodo and Sam traverse Sauron's "wilderness of fear," Frodo's anxiety weakens him to the point to where he must crawl to continue (RK 258). Arriving at the mountain's foot, "pitifully he began to crawl forward on his hands" (RK 268). In this dreadful situation, one finds in Frodo the heroism that Spearing assigns to Gawain. Frodo also displays a

heroism of a particularly touching kind - not the kind that shows no fear, but the kind that overcomes a fear to which all the senses are sharpened. (PG 103)

Thus does the heroism of Gawain form an analogy for Frodo's heroism.

As the tale continues, Frodo finds the Cracks of Doom. When the Ring is destroyed, the mountain erupts and the hobbits are unexpectedly rescued by Gandalf. With the Ring's destruction comes the fall of the evil Sauron, and Frodo and Sam eventually return to the Shire.

CONCLUSION

In retrospect, we do indeed find analogues of heroic speech for the characters of *The Lord of the Rings* within the early English poems of *Beowulf* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. We do not know if Tolkien intentionally modeled the words of his characters after those of the early English heroes. But so immersed was Tolkien's imagination in the medieval world that the parallels truly exist.

Whether Tolkien used these sources consciously or unconsciously, the language of his characters has sources in *Beowulf* and *Sir Gawain*.

The heroic language of *Beowulf*, Wiglaf, and Gawain provides sources for the speech of Gandalf, Sam, and Frodo. *Beowulf*'s language testifies to his verbal prowess and declares his physical strength. Gandalf's language also testifies to his own verbal prowess and declares his physical strength. In Sam, the loyal language of Wiglaf has a mirror. Gawain's anti-quest of doom, complete with his words of pessimism, honor, and perseverance, provides an analogy for Frodo's language as the hobbit also pursues an anti-quest of doom.

By associating the heroic language of Gandalf, Sam, and Frodo with that of *Beowulf*, Wiglaf, and Gawain, our reading of *The Lord of the Rings* is enhanced. To the reader unaware of the analogies in early English literature, the trilogy is nothing more than the vivid imagination of one man. But to the enlightened reader, a knowledge of Tolkien's references enriches an already imaginative work. Perhaps no one but Tolkien could have so skillfully woven the various medieval tales into a single modern work of the old tradition. So subtle are the presentations of Gandalf as *Beowulf*, of Sam as Wiglaf, and Frodo as Gawain, that they are quite easily overlooked even by someone familiar with the medieval tales. The enhancements of paralleling the speeches of the heroes are as follows: from being a bent old man, Gandalf is elevated to the stature of the Anglo-Saxon epic hero *Beowulf*, Sam's rank is raised from that of a buffoon to that of a loyal Anglo-Saxon warrior, such as Wiglaf, and Frodo, the simple hobbit, becomes the chivalrous knight Gawain.

By using heroic language from *Beowulf* and *Sir Gawain*, Tolkien pays tribute to the heroes of old. In today's society it is a tribute worth noting. After all, our society seems to have toppled over the noble heroes of old and set up ignoble ones in their stead. If our society cannot conjure up heroes whose language reflects truth (*Beowulf* — "I speak truly"), strength (*Beowulf* — "not easily from there / I brought my life away"), loyalty (Wiglaf — "let us go to him, / help our war leader"), and perseverance (Gawain — "I will go to the chapel, whatever may happen"), then society should give notice to the words of the ancient heroes. As Tolkien proclaims in his essay "*Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*," "Let us by all means esteem the old heroes...."³² Using the heroic language of the medieval English heroes, Tolkien has done exactly that. ~

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